

A glorious centennial: the DAA turns 100

By Mary Schiess
Clipper Contributor

Centennials afford a reminder to appreciate the past, to celebrate the present and to anticipate the future. The Duxbury Art Association is doing just that.

In 1917, artist, scientist and Duxbury resident Charles Bittinger invited friends, artists and art lovers to his home. He suggested a summer art exhibit with paintings by well-known artists and locals. This gathering defined the beginning of the Duxbury Art Association. The meeting also heralded Duxbury as a significant venue in the art realm of Rockport, Old Lyme, Connecticut, Provincetown, Lynn and Ogunquit, Maine, and along Long Island. Duxbury summer resident Winthrop Coffin offered financial support for the fledgling adventure.

Robert C. "Terry" Vose III, formally co-owner of Vose Galleries of Boston, noted, "the founding artists of the Duxbury Art Association were all either important with reputations in their local communities, nationally and moreover internationally."

Vose notes the exceptional quality of the artists. Exhibitors in early shows of 1917 to 1921 included Charles Woodbury, Frank W. Benson, Charles Bittinger, John Singer Sargent, William Paxton and Marjorie Conant Bush-Brown.

After two years of study at MIT, DAA founder Charles Bittinger concentrated on an art career. His studies took him to the Sorbonne and the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. His work included impressionism, landscapes, and delicate painting of interiors. His DAA award winning painting, "Livery of the Palace at Versailles," is in the St. Louis Art Museum's permanent collection.

Bittinger was also a member of the National Academy of Design, an invitation-only organization. During his U.S. Navy career, Bittinger combined science and art as he experimented with camouflage techniques.

Early DAA exhibits occurred at the Partridge Academy. Records indicate the strong Duxbury interest in art, the modest fees involved, and the contributions in support of World War I.

Frank Weston Benson, another prominent Duxbury artist, was both student and instructor at the Boston MFA and in Paris. His acclaimed work includes realistic portraits and impressionistic paintings. Benson's descendants continue to reside in Duxbury today.



Sue Aygarn-Kowalski prepares a sculpting for exhibit at the 2018 Winter Show.



Elisabeth Weber-Fulop, "Peasants Going Church, Tyrol" 1936-1937 Courtesy of the Art Complex Museum Collection. Weber-Fulop was an internationally acclaimed painter before she moved to Duxbury and purchased the King Caesar House.

After suspension of exhibits during World War II, the Rev. Abbott Peterson supported the revival of the DAA. In those post-war years, DAA sponsored numerous activities including lectures, an exhibit of high school students' art, dinner and lectures at the Drew House, a show of fine portraits collected locally. Eventually, the summer show moved to the boat shed and on to the Duxbury Bay Maritime School. Winter juried shows continue at the Duxbury Art Complex Museum.

In the late 1950s, DAA President Cecil Atwater brought his photographic expertise to the role. Among Atwater's contributions was a lecture called "Pictorial Photography and Its Place in the Fine Arts."

In the 1960s Barbara Clifford received an invitation to join the DAA board and eventually became DAA president. Given her background as a musician, she questioned her role. At this time Duxbury supported a number of artistic endeavors including the Conservatory, the Bay Players, the Helen Bumpus Gallery, and the Art Association. A need for an art center emerged. Leaders felt Barbara could offer an organizational and purpose-driven agenda for the art community. She acquiesced. Her mission included maintaining the viability of the DAA.



Abbot Peterson, "Sailing Near Bug Light Duxbury Bay" 1930 Courtesy of private collector. Peterson revived the DAA after World War II. Photos by Mary Schiess



Charles H. Woodbury, "Crowd on Beach and Dunes" 1927, Courtesy of private collector. Woodbury's works exist in the Art Institute of Chicago, the MFA, and the Metropolitan Museum of New York

On Saturday, Feb. 3, the DAA will open its Winter Juried Show at the Art Complex Museum. An army of famous artists and not too famous art lovers has helped DAA arrive at its centennial.

Current president Jewon Wee appraises the future this way: "I'd love to see DAA find a working artist to take over the president role, someone who is well connected in the local and national art communities and get other working artists to support DAA, as Charles Bittinger was able to do.

"I agreed to be the interim president while we complete the transition back to the volunteer model, but I believe that having a professional artist as the president, and supporting him or her with an engaged team of both

artists and patrons, would be in the best interest of the DAA. That person will be much better positioned than me in aligning DAA with many other regional and national art organizations and collaborate with them to help artists gain exposure, find buyers of their work and share their knowledge with each other. Jill Boudreau DAA treasurer, has done an awesome job helping us balance the budget and we had so many volunteers (board member and non-board members) contribute many hours of free labor to help us get to a good financial position."

Now, Wee's board appreciates his background as a consultant and his ability to define what they call "the big picture." Wee has a double major, which includes fine art history. Blending his wisdom in business with his knowledge of art, Wee emerges as a perfect leader for the DAA.

This year's DAA exhibit will include a Founders' Exhibit. Works of Bitterridge, Benson, Peterson, Woodbury, Weber-Fulop and others will join the 80-juried artists. The exhibit continues through April 22 at the Art Complex Museum. The museum is open Wednesday through Sunday from 1-4. Admission is free.



Charles H. Woodbury, "Sunken Ledges" c1910
Courtesy of The Art Complex Museum Collection.
Woodbury taught in Boston and Ogunquit. His school attracted the likes of Edward Hopper and George Bellows.